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Milfoil discovered in the upper Merrimack River

Concord, NH – A volunteer with the Upper Merrimack Monitoring Program (UMMP) has discovered an infestation of the aggressive non-native plant, variable milfoil, in the upper Merrimack River. The plant is native to the southern and Midwest areas of the United States, but it is non-native to New Hampshire, where it is deemed an invasive exotic plant. Variable milfoil is believed to have first come to New Hampshire when aquarium owners disposed of it in a pond or lake in the 1960s. Since that time the plant has spread rapidly throughout New Hampshire's waterbodies. In just one season, the plant's rapid and dense growth can choke out all of the native plants and make a waterbody nearly non-navigable.

For nearly ten years, the UMMP has monitored waters in the Merrimack watershed including the Merrimack, Winnepesaukee, Pemigewasset and Contoocook Rivers. The infestation was found in the Merrimack River near the confluence of the Contoocook. Volunteers Win Robinson and Steve Landry spotted the plant last fall, but it was too decayed to make a positive identification. This year, the volunteers obtained fresh samples that bore a flower stalk, making the identification possible. Amy Smagula, of the N.H. Department of Environmental Services, confirmed the identification during a Weed Watcher training for the UMMP.

"The Department of Environmental Services plans to work with the UMMP to find and map infestations of variable milfoil along the Merrimack River and will make recommendations about possible management strategies once further site assessments have been conducted," said Smagula.

"Participation in the Weed Watchers program is now even more imperative for the UMMP," said Landry. "Although the UMMP has established baseline river quality data through habitat assessments, chemical parameters, *E. coli* sampling, and biomonitoring using macroinvertebrates as indicators, we really haven't taken steps to monitor aquatic vegetation trends."

Michele Tremblay, UMMP program director added, "With infestations of variable milfoil in the Winnepesaukee and Contoocook Rivers, the upper Merrimack River is extremely vulnerable to

new infestations since the Merrimack River is on the receiving end of both of these major drainages.”

Amy Smagula commented that “since the infestation is in a river system, it is much more mobile than could be expected from a confined lake system. Groups monitoring downstream waters should increase their vigilance to find and report new infestations immediately. Eradication is not possible once an infestation covers large areas but small new patches can be identified and removed through hand-pulling and other small scale management practices.”

“With many of our volunteers trained, we plan to expand our monitoring efforts to manage this infestation and prevent others,” said Tremblay.

For more information about the Upper Merrimack Monitoring Program, please contact Michele Tremblay at (603) 796-2615 or mtrembla@tds.net. For information on milfoil and/or the Weed Watchers program, please contact Amy Smagula at (603) 271-2248 or asmagula@des.state.nh.us.

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